



न्यायालय मुख्य आयुक्त दिव्यांगजन

COURT OF THE CHIEF COMMISSIONER FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (DIVYANGJAN)

दिव्यांगजन सशक्तिकरण विभाग/Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan)

सामाजिक न्याय और अधिकारिता मंत्रालय/Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment

भारत सरकार/Government of India

५वाँ तल, एन.आई.एस.डी. भवन, जी-२, सेक्टर-१०, द्वारका, नई दिल्ली-११००७५; दूरभाष : (०११) २०८९२३६४

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Case no. CCPD/14269/1092/2023

In the matter of:

Pradyuman Singh Ranawat

...Complainant

Versus

The Secretary,
Department of Science and Technology

...Respondent

1. Gist of the complaint:

1.1 Shri Pradyuman Singh Ranawat, a person with 50% Locomotor Disability, submitted a complaint dated 24.05.2023 and stated that in recent months, the Department of Science & Technology has approved several research projects. Yet, no special consideration has been given to proposals submitted by faculty members with disabilities. Despite a legally mandated 4% reservation, there appears to be no effective implementation for persons with disabilities (PwDs) in project allocation.

1.2 The Complainant argues that PwDs cannot be treated as equals in physical or work capacity and should be considered under separate criteria. It is highlighted that the department has no record of any project or funding being allocated to disabled faculty in the past five years, which indicates systemic neglect.

1.3 Further, he requests that persons with disabilities be considered independently from other categories, such as General, OBC, SC, or ST, and evaluated based on the 4% reservation quota in total allocations. Very few universities have disabled professors, and even fewer support them in research, despite their desire and capability to contribute to national development. He urges the Department to consider project proposals from disabled faculty under the reservation policy itself, stating that even the Hon'ble Supreme Court has recognised selection based on mere application in such contexts. He requests intervention from the Secretary, the Director, and the Ministry of Science & Technology to ensure fair treatment and the approval of his proposal.

2. Notice to the Respondent:

2.1 A notice dated 05.07.2023 was sent to the Respondents for forwarding to this Court comments on affidavit on the complaint for violation of section 20 within the statutory time limit.

3. Reply filed by the Respondent:

3.1 The Respondent Dr Ramesh V., Scientist 'D' at the Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB), submitted a reply dated 04.08.2023 on affidavit in response to a complaint regarding the denial of reservation under the SERB-SURE scheme. He clarified that SERB is a statutory body under the Department of Science & Technology (DST), mandated to fund research projects purely based on scientific merit, innovation, and the competence of the applicant. The SERB-SURE scheme, like other SERB schemes, is a competitive research grant, not an employment or recruitment process.

3.2 He stated that the Complainant's proposal was evaluated and rejected on merit by an expert committee, and the claim for reservation under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, is not applicable in such grant-based programs. SERB does provide age relaxation to persons with benchmark disabilities where age is an eligibility criterion, but no category-based reservation is provided in any scheme, including for SC/ST/OBC or women applicants.

3.3 The affidavit further referred to a similar earlier case (Case No. 9081/1031/2017), where the Court had ruled that the reservation was not applicable as selection was entirely merit-based. It was also

highlighted that 26 researchers with disabilities had received SERB funding in the last five years, indicating equal opportunity. Dr. Ramesh concluded that any policy change regarding reservations would require a decision at the highest level of governance.

4. Rejoinder filed by the Complainant:

4.1 The Complainant filed the rejoinder dated 27.08.2023, and submitted a research proposal under the SERB-SURE scheme of the Department of Science and Technology (DST). He argues that his rights under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, have been violated, as the proposal was rejected without considering the special provisions guaranteed to persons with disabilities. The applicant claims that he was treated as a general candidate despite disclosing his disability status and emphasises that his work is genuine, innovative, and developed with sincere effort, which should qualify for support under the said scheme.

4.2 He highlights that the DST officials, including the scrutiny committee, failed to inform the expert panel about his disability status, thereby denying him the benefit of being evaluated under the extraordinary rights reserved for disabled individuals. He points out inconsistencies in DST's responses, particularly regarding the number of disabled candidates previously funded, and alleges that no transparent data has been provided. The applicant contends that the officials are more focused on defending their position rather than acknowledging the Act and addressing the systemic discrimination faced by disabled researchers.

4.3 In light of these concerns, the Complainant requests the Hon'ble Court to intervene and direct DST to reconsider his proposal with due consideration of the Disabilities Act. He also urges that appropriate action be taken against the responsible officials for non-compliance and violation of the Act. The Complainant seeks justice not only for himself but to set a precedent ensuring equal opportunity and rightful financial support for all eligible persons with disabilities in the academic and research sectors.

5. Hearing:

5.1 A Hearing in hybrid mode (offline/online) was conducted on 08.09.2025. The following Parties/ Representatives were present:

S.No.	Name and designation of the Attendees	On Behalf of	Mode of attendance
1.	Pradyuman Singh Rajawat	Complainant	Online
2.	Advocate Manish Mohan, Central Government Standing Counsel	For Respondent	Online

6. Record of Proceedings:

6 . 1 The Complainant raised a grievance regarding the non-implementation of reservations for persons with disabilities (PwDs) in various research projects and fellowship schemes under the Department of Science and Technology (DST). He stated that despite Section 34 of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016, mandating reservation, DST had not extended this benefit to PwDs in research grants, fellowships, or grant-in-aid programs. He further alleged that his proposal under the SURE Project (Scientific Utilisation through Research and Experimentation), earlier administered by the Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB), was rejected without extending the benefit of reservation.

6.2 The Complainant pointed out that while category-based schemes such as the EEQ Scheme for SC/ST candidates and the KIRAN Scheme for women existed, there was no equivalent program for PwDs, which he argued amounted to discrimination. He contended that reservation for PwDs was horizontal in nature, cutting across all categories, and that its denial violated Section 34 of the RPwD Act as well as the constitutional principle of equality of opportunity. He further asserted that the Department's reasoning that "no category-based reservation existed" was misconceived, since horizontal reservation was independent of vertical categories and applied across the board.

6.3 In response, Advocate Manish Mohan, CGSC, appearing for DST, submitted that the SURE Project was a competitive, merit-based research scheme in which applications were assessed purely on technical grounds through peer review. He clarified that such project selections were not "employment" and therefore did not attract the

reservation provisions of Section 34 of the RPwD Act. It was also stated that SERB had been dissolved under the National Research Foundation (NRF) Act, 2023, and that the NRF framework under Section 27(1) mandated funding on a competitive and merit-based basis, leaving no scope for category-based reservation.

6.4 The Respondent submitted that an Expert Committee had evaluated the Complainant's proposal, constituted by SERB, and was rejected solely on technical grounds, as recorded in the peer-review report dated 09.05.2023. It was further stated that several researchers with disabilities had received DST and SERB grants — 26 in the past five years, and a total of 66 as of August 2023 — indicating inclusiveness and absence of discrimination. The respondent relied on an earlier order dated 12.11.2018 of the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities (Case No. 9081/1031/2017), which held that research grant schemes being purely merit-based did not attract reservation provisions.

6.5 The Complainant, however, argued that reliance on the 2018 order was misplaced since it predated the NRF Act, 2023 and the expanded obligations under the RPwD Act, 2016. He highlighted that DST had subsequently introduced category-specific schemes such as EEQ and KIRAN, demonstrating that similar targeted programs could and should be created for PwDs. Therefore, the assertion that "no reservation exists for any category" was no longer valid.

6.6 The Court inquired whether the grant selections under these projects amounted to employment or recruitment and whether researchers were retained permanently. The respondent clarified that all such grants were temporary, project-based (typically for 3-5 years), and that project staff were engaged only for the project duration. It was further explained that Principal Investigators were regular faculty members in recognised institutions, and that while PwDs were eligible to apply, no specific relaxation in evaluation criteria was provided apart from a five-year age relaxation.

6.7 Upon further questioning, the Respondent admitted that although special programs existed for SC/ST and women researchers with government approval, no parallel scheme had yet been introduced for PwDs due to a lack of policy approval and budgetary sanction. The

Court noted that while no individual discrimination was evident in the complainant's case, the structural absence of mechanisms for inclusion of PwDs in research programs remained unaddressed.

6.8 The Court observed that while project-based funding did not constitute employment, participation in such research programs played a crucial role in career progression and academic advancement. It expressed concern over the systemic underrepresentation of researchers with disabilities in government-funded scientific projects and emphasised the need for DST and NRF to adopt reasonable accommodation and inclusive policy measures to ensure equitable participation of PwDs in future research initiatives.

7. Observations and Recommendations:

7.1 The Court advises that the Complainant could continue to apply for future calls under relevant schemes and submit technically strong proposals, as the current rejection appeared to be based on merit-related grounds. It is directed that, in case of any future rejection appearing to be discriminatory, the complainant could submit the evidence before the Court for further examination.

7.2 The Court concludes that the present complaint does not reveal any specific act of discrimination, since no reservation existed for any category in such research funding schemes. However, it is recommended that DST and the National Research Foundation consider establishing a dedicated program or fellowship for researchers with disabilities to promote inclusivity, in line with the RPwD Act, 2016.

7.3 With these observations and recommendations, the matter is disposed of, with liberty granted to the Complainant to re-approach this Court if, in future, a meritorious proposal is rejected on discriminatory grounds.

8. The case is disposed of accordingly.

(S. Govindaraj)
Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities